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DEPT FOR EUR/NCE AARON JENSEN

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SUBJECT: FORMER PNL PRESIDENTS EXPELLED AS PARTY TURMOIL  
CONTINUES

REF: BUCHAREST 1202

Classified By: Policial Counselor Ted Tanoue for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)  
) .

¶1. (C) Summary: Internecine squabbling in the National Liberal Party (PNL) has claimed more prominent critics of Prime Minister Tariceanu. Two former PNL Presidents, Valeriu Stoica and Theodor Stolojan, are the biggest names in a long list of party leaders expelled in recent weeks. The two responded by launching a platform to revitalize the Liberals and unify center-right parties in a "federation"-type arrangement short of a full-fledged merger. While the launch of the alternative platform did not trigger any immediate defections, Stoica told us the move will shore up support for the post-Tariceanu future. Younger PNL voices view the Stolojan-Stoica axis as yesterday's news. While acknowledging Tariceanu's weaknesses, they see no immediate alternative in sight, and bemoan the party's "talent gap" in the race with Basescu's Democratic party to develop attractive new candidates. Either way, the Liberals have probably done themselves a disservice, at least in terms of providing the party a larger role in the country's future. End Summary.

Purging the critics  
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¶2. (C) On October 18, the leadership of a Bucharest PNL branch expelled Valeriu Stoica, president of the PNL in 2001-2002 and deputy PNL president from 1997-2001. Ten days earlier, former PNL president from 2002-2004 (and ex-Prime Minister) Theodor Stolojan was stripped of party membership under similar circumstances. Both were accused of violating party discipline and making statements critical of the party leadership. In late September, two young and promising PNL deputies, Raluca Turcan and Cristian Boureanu, were also expelled by the top party executive body. Earlier in the month, another critic (and possible future rival) of PM Tariceanu, former minister of culture and PNL vice-president Mona Musca, was ousted for alleged collaboration with the communist-era Securitate.

¶3. (C) Although expelled for different reasons and by different party bodies, all these former PNL personalities shared a common critical stance vis--vis the current PNL leadership and especially of PNL president, PM Calin Popescu-Tariceanu. Over the past year, party dissidents have attacked Tariceanu for blocking a planned merger between the PNL and PD, and for political cronyism, adoption of an increasingly autocratic leadership style, and his surprise demand for withdrawal of Romanian troops from Iraq. The other common denominator of the dissidents was a positive relationship with Basescu, who is in turn anathema to Tariceanu, his circle of young political lieutenants, and the Prime Minister's principal financial backer, Dinu Patriciu.

## Liberals vs. Liberals

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14. (C) Criticism from the dissident PNL wing culminated with the launch of an alternative party platform on October 15. Signatories included Stoica, Stolojan, Turcan and Boureanu. Mona Musca announced she would not attend the public launch of the platform and said she would not rejoin the political fray until she cleared her name of charges that she was a Securitate informer during the Ceaurescu era.

15. (C) The alternative platform is a pastiche of proposals previously floated by Stoica (widely seen as the force behind this current challenge to Tariceanu), Stolojan and Musca. The platform includes calls for the creation of a large center-right political bloc capable of challenging the mainstream social-democratic party, with the aim of establishing in Romania a two-party system in order to increase efficiency and good governance. The platform also accuses the PNL leadership of failing to promote the unification of center-right political parties, reserving special opprobrium for Tariceanu for opposing a merger with the Democratic Party.

### King or King-maker?

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16. (C) In a meeting with Polcouns, Stocia said the PNL dissidents and the current party leadership were divided by their competing visions for the party's future. He said that under Stolojan and himself, the goal had been a large center-right party that could attract at least 25 percent of the electoral votes. In contrast, Tariceanu and his

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collaborators wanted a more easily controlled niche party (with no more than a 10-12 percent vote share) that could play the role of "king-maker" but might never be king. Stoica said that prospects for a PNL-PD merger were "dead" because of competing party histories, ambitions, and egos. He added that it still was possible to create a "federation" of center-right parties stronger than the current coalition, but short of a full fledged merger.

17. (C) Stoica insisted that he was not trying to split the PNL or to form a new party. Characterizing Tariceanu and his supporters as strategic amateurs," Stoica said Tariceanu had compounded the error of competing head-to-head with the popular Basescu by expelling the PNL,s most popular figures (Stolojan and Musca consistently rank among the most popular political figures in Romania, well ahead in the polls of the Prime Minister). Stoica acknowledged, however, that Tariceanu had succeeded in cowing the majority of remaining party leaders, who were keeping their heads down for the time being. Stoica said that he was treating his expected expulsion from the PNL with equanimity as he had been expelled previously from the PNL but had returned to head the party; in turn, he had expelled Tariceanu when he was in charge. Stoica said that he did not expect the alternative platform to trigger any immediate changes within the PNL. The goal was to "raise the flag" to announce that there is now an alternative PNL leadership for the post-Tariceanu era.

### Generational Divide

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18. (C) A contrasting voice came from PNL Deputy (and head of the PNL Youth Wing) Cristian Adomnitei. Adomnitei agreed that the Stoica-Stolojan platform was meant to position the former leaders for a possible post-Tariceanu era, but noted that Tariceanu,s role as PNL president was secure at least until the advent of elections. He said talk of early elections was receding, as even deputies from Basescu,s own party were loathe to abandon a secure seat for the uncertainties and costs of running in new elections.

Adomnitei insisted that far from being credible alternatives to Tariceanu, Stoica and Stolojan (and to a lesser extend, Mona Musca) represented an older generation of PNL leaders whose public wrangling with Tariceanu had itself weakened the party.

¶9. (C) Adomnitei also defended the PNL decision to expel Stoica, Stolojan, and Musca, noting that they were seen by the party rank and file as working against party interests. He said there was always room in the PNL for dissenting voices, as evidenced by such younger PNL leaders as PNL Bucharest branch head Ludovic Orban and PNL Deputy Crin Antonescu. Both were highly visible for defending the PNL and attacking President Basescu, but they also did not spare Tariceanu from criticism as being weak and indecisive.

But Successor Generation Not Ready  
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¶10. (C) Adomnitei opined that Orban appeared to be genuinely uninterested in vying for the party leadership. In contrast, Antonescu had ambitions of taking over the PNL. He characterized Antonescu as an excellent orator who lacks management and strategic skills. Adomnitei added that he was not himself in the pro-Tariceanu camp; he was firmly on the side of Chamber of Deputies President Bogdan Olteanu, whom he characterized as "the best representative of the new generation of PNL leaders." Adomnitei confided, however, that while Tariceanu was not necessarily the "best" leader for the PNL, Olteanu was not yet mature enough to take over the job.

¶11. (C) Adomnitei also bemoaned the "talent gap" in the younger generation of PNL leaders, noting that the party had always had difficulty in finding good candidates to fill key government posts. He said that Cristian David,s perennial candidacy for whatever new government vacancy emerged was a good example of this. Adomnitei said the problem was exacerbated by Romania,s improving business environment; politics was no longer as attractive a career option for smart, ambitious youths as it was in the post-Ceausescu era. He also acknowledged that Basescu,s Democratic Party was better than the PNL in recruiting attractive "new faces." Adomnitei blamed PNL "laziness" in not assuming "difficult" portfolios such as the Interior, Justice, and Economic ministries, adding that this was unfortunately part of the institutional culture of the PNL, which was content with remaining a "small party."

¶12. (C) Comment: The recent expulsions appear to be a

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Pyrrhic victory for Tariceanu. The departure of its most popular members leaves the party weaker, both in terms of talent and popular support. Yet Tariceanu,s continued tenure as party President seems assured for the time given the general lack of enthusiasm for early elections and the elimination of competitors in party ranks. The current bitter wrangling within the PNL is entirely in character with its turbulent post- 1989 history. It split into six parties in the early nineties, lost its parliamentary representation in 1992 and reunited only with great difficulty in the late 1990s. Neither the expulsion of two former party presidents, nor the launch of the alternative "liberal platform" appear to have had much immediate impact, as only two party branches came out publicly in support of the dissidents. While the PNL discord has been a windfall for President Basescu and the PD, they have taken a low-key stance, refusing to openly take sides. It is a luxury that they can afford. If the Liberal dissidents break off to form a new party, it will be a better partner for the PD than the PNL; if not, they may eventually migrate (on Basescu's terms) to the PD. End Comment.  
Taubman